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THOUGHTS BEFORE MY MIRROR.

BY MRS. MARY M. COMSTOCK.

And who is this before me now?
That in my glass I see,
With faded hair, and furrowed brow?
Oh, I, THIS CAN NOT BE!
My soul responds to joyous strains,
My heart—no! not even then,
The warm blood surges through my veins,
Then how can I be old?
The true babe upon my breast
Has grown to manhood's prime;
My children now seek their rest
In other arms than mine,
And summers, ten times six, have passed,
With all their bloom and blight,
Yet still my spirit seems to bask
In childhood's sunny light.
Oh, come, one's talents for me!
Through thy plinches' fold,
My form may sink beneath thy blow,
My heart can not grow old.

The White Witch: OR, THE LEAGUE OF THREE.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "HEARTS OF FIRE," "WOLF DEMON,"
"SCARLET HAND," "ACE OF SPADES," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASQUERADE-BALL.

The large ball-room of the Ocean House at Newport, the far-famed summer-resort, was filled almost to suffocation by a gay and brilliant throng.

It was the last masquerade of the season—the crowning triumph of mirth's brilliant reign.

On the morrow the crowd of laughing maskers would depart for their city homes.

The crash of the music mingled with the joyous notes of the hilarious voices, with the rustle of the motley masquerading garments, and the light tread of tripping feet.

In a corner of the room stood two of the masqueraders in close conversation. The two were of the sterner sex. Like all within the room, they were habited in fanciful costumes, which, with the masks they wore over their faces, completely concealed their identity.

The first of the two, who stood nearest to the door that gave entrance to the ball-room, was small in stature; a dainty little fellow; in form, an Apollo in miniature. He was dressed in a rich court suit, of the style worn by the butterfly couriers of Louis XIV of France. The coat was of the finest silk-velvet, a rich wine in color, and adorned with heavy, gold embroidery and jeweled buttons, that sparkled like diamonds in the blaze of the gas-light. His perfectly proportioned lower limbs were incased in pearly silk stockings and lemon-colored knee-breeches of lustrous satin. The diamond-buckled shoes, the embroidered waist-coat, flowing lace neck-tie and powdered wig, completed the elegant costume.

The dress was perfect and fitted the perfect form of the young man like a kid-glove fits the hand.

One thing we have neglected to mention.

In the snowy folds of the costly lace handkerchief, that was fastened carelessly around his neck, gleamed a strange ornament. It was a golden brooch, fashioned in the likeness of the tulip flower, and thickly spotted with tiny little rubies. An odd conceit.

The second of the two was a large and portly person. He was dressed as a monk, in a gray domino, the cowl drawn tightly over his head. The domino was girded in at the waist by a string of wooden beads, from which hung a rudely-shaped cross. His face was concealed by a mask that portrayed the features of an old man with a heavy, flowing, gray beard.

The hands of the monk, playing nervously with the cross suspended from his waist, were coarse and clumsy, red in color and ugly in outline—the hands of a man accustomed to rough and dirty labor, yet they were covered with rings wherein shone precious stones. Diamonds and rubies, emeralds and pearls, adorned the ugly, coarse fingers.

There was as much difference between the hands of the large man who wore the monk's garb and the white and delicate fingers of his companion, dressed in the court suit, as there was in their figures. As much difference in their natures as there was in their hands.

Yet these two men were intimate friends.

The smaller of the two—the delicate little fellow—was called Tulip Roche; a gentleman by birth and breeding, an exquisite by nature and by habit. The only son of wealthy parents, at their death he had inherited an ample fortune.

Tulip was noted among the fast young "bloods" of New York—in which city he resided—for his taste and excellent judgment.

He was the best-dressed man who walked Broadway. His carriages and horses not excelled by any "turnout" ever seen within the thronged driveways of Central Park. His up-town mansion on Murray Hill was the envy of the neighborhood. All that taste could devise or money procure adorned it.

"A glorious, good fellow, though devilish peculiar in his ideas," said the World, of Tulip Roche.

His companion, the stout man dressed as a monk, was called Herman Stoll—a German by birth, or, as his enemies said, bluntly, a German Jew; as though a man's birth and parentage could be flung in his face as a disgrace.

Was the taunt of his foes truth or not? Herman Stoll indignantly denied that Jewish blood flowed in his veins, although, after one look into his face—one quick glance



Within one month, or one year, you will lose wealth, friends and love. All will desert you.

at the high cheek-bones, large, curved nose, piercing black eyes, and short, crispy, curly hair—any one gifted with the skill of "reading faces" would surely have concluded that Herman Stoll lied when he declared that no blood of the scattered nation, who can not claim a country of their own, ran in his veins.

Herman Stoll was a broker by occupation, doing business in Wall street, and reported to be a sharp, far-seeing man, and one well gifted with this world's golden treasures.

If the broker was not a wealthy man he acted like one, and spent money as freely as though it were as easily got as water.

A great patron of the "turf" was Herman; a bright and shining light among the frequenters of Jerome Park, and like places. His face, too, was well known to the *attaches* of the opera-house and the leading theaters.

But to the conversation of the two.

"Who is that?" asked Stoll, as a tall, elegant figure wearing the sable robes of "Hamlet," and having on his arm a blonde beauty attired in the bluish sheen of "Morning," passed by them.

"Which one—the man or the woman?" asked Tulip.

"Well, both?" replied his friend.

"To commence with the lady first, she is called Frances Chauncy—"

"What! the Lexington avenue belle?" interrupted Stoll.

"The same," Tulip replied.

"I didn't know that she was here."

"You haven't used your eyes much, then?"

"Why, is she stopping at the hotel?" asked Stoll.

"No, she is with some friends, who have a cottage near the West Beach."

"Ah, I thought that it would be impossible for her to stop here and escape my notice."

"She has been out on the drive and down on the beach often enough."

"Yes, that may be, but I haven't happened to notice her," replied Stoll; "but the man, who is he? He looks deuced well in that dress."

"Did it turn his head at all, when he came into this property?"

"Oh, no!" Tulip replied, with a laugh.

"He accepted it as a matter of course. He had not been brought up to know the want of money."

"That is, he is a man born with a silver spoon in his mouth, as the saying is," Stoll said.

"Yes, only his spoon was a gold one."

"He knows how to take care of his money, too, I'm told."

"Yes, he's no fool."

"And this Miss Chauncy, is he engaged to her?"

Tulip, gazing intently after the handsome couple, did not notice the thrill of pain that shook Tulip's light form as the carelessly put question fell upon his ear.

"I—I really can not say," Tulip answered slowly.

"Well, if one can judge by their manner toward each other, at any rate, they are lovers."

"Miss Chauncy is said to be something of a coquette."

"A coquette?"

"Yes, I believe it is so reported," Tulip replied.

"It would be just his luck to get her," said Stoll, coarsely. "These money-bags always marry each other."

"Well, he may get her, and then again he may not," Tulip observed, dryly.

Something in the tone of Tulip's voice attracted Stoll's attention. He turned from the masqueraders to his companion.

"Hallo! I fancy that—to use the popular saying—"I smell a mice." Did you ever care for Miss Chauncy?"

Tulip winced at the question.

"Oh, don't be afraid to answer," Stoll continued. "If my suspicion is true, we are both in the same boat."

"What do you mean?" Tulip demanded.

"Why, that both of us have cause to hate this Angus Montgomery."

Tulip looked with wondering eyes upon Stoll. The broker's voice was hoarse with passion as he uttered the words.

"And do you hate him?"

"No man in this world do I hate more bitterly," replied Stoll, angrily.

"And why so? Do you love this beautiful girl, Frances Chauncy?"

"Love!" exclaimed Stoll, in scorn, "love a woman, that strange compound of vanity and deceit? Oh, no! I like women well enough, until I tire of them, which is very

soon. But, as to hating any man on account of a woman— Well, when I do that, they can send me to the lunatic asylum."

"Why then do you hate him?"

"Tulip, I can't very well explain," said Stoll, in confusion; "but I do hate him, and I'd go a thousand miles and spend a thousand dollars to be revenged upon him."

"And so would I!" added Roche, firmly.

"I guessed right then about Miss Chauncy."

"Yes, two months ago she gave me her word that she would be my wife."

"And she has broken that promise?"

"She has not yet told me so, but I feel sure, from what I have seen and heard, that she has. This Montgomery is the cause of it, and I'll be even with him, even if it costs me my life!"

Little did Montgomery know of the foes that were so near him.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORACLE'S WARNING.

"HAMLET" and "Morning," represented by Mr. Angus Montgomery and Miss Frances Chauncy, promenaded, gayly, down the room together.

As Tulip Roche had guessed—as all the fashionable world, who were making Newport their summer home, had said—the twain were lovers.

Chatting together, saying those "soft nothings" that are so sweet to lovers' ears, they made their way through the ever-changing groups of masqueraders.

Suddenly the two were confronted by a figure dressed all in white.

The form was that of a woman arrayed in a domino of white silk. A mask of the same hue and material concealed her face.

The hood of the domino being tightly drawn over her head, met the mask in front, so that no stray lock of hair could be seen.

The little hands of the woman were covered by white kid gloves. The tiny feet that peeped out from under the folds of the domino were incased in white boots.

All was white.

But through the snowy mask shone a pair of large, jet-black eyes, eyes full of life and fire.

The two halted, in astonishment, when they were confronted by the strange, white figure.

"Black and white are the hues of mourning, the emblems of grief; they do not look well together," said the figure in white, in a low voice, evidently disguised.

Montgomery did not like the words of the speaker. She plainly referred to his sable dress of Hamlet and the white robes representing "Morning," worn by Miss Chauncy.

"And who is it that stops our path with this remarkable observation?" said Montgomery, in a tone of banter, while the blonde beauty leaned heavily on his arm and looked at the slender, white figure before them in astonishment.

"Do you not see the color of my dress?"

"Yes."

"I am called THE WHITE WITCH!"

"The White Witch! indeed?"

"Yes I can tell of the past—"

"That is not difficult; history does the same."

"Speak also of the present."

"The daily newspaper is your rival there."

"And sometimes reveal the future," said the disguised figure, solemnly.

"Ah, now you are stating something wonderful," said Montgomery, laughing. He fancied that this extraordinary commencement was but the prelude to one of the usual masquerading jokes. "I suppose that if I cross your palm with silver, you will tell me all about my future life. Tell me whom I shall marry—how many times, and in fact, all the particulars?"

"Oh, I don't like fortune-tellers," said Miss Chauncy, petulantly, "they always say such horrid, disagreeable things."

"Do not fear, lady," said the White Witch, softly; "I can not tell your fortune."

"Only mine, then, eh?" said Montgomery, beginning to enjoy the joke.

"Yes, only yours."

"You see how highly favored I am by fortune!" exclaimed the young man, laughing.

"Perhaps you will not think that you are highly favored when you hear the fate that is in store for you," said the White Witch, slowly and sadly.

"There, I knew it would be something disagreeable!" exclaimed the blonde beauty, in a tone of conviction.

"I have excited my curiosity, and now I am determined to hear what my fate is to be—that is, if you can tell me," said the young man, gayly.

"Within one month at most you will not doubt my power," replied the mysterious figure.

"That's right, pitch it strong, as my old music-master used to say," said Montgomery, laughing.

"You will follow me, then?"

"Where?"

"Only to the balcony. What I have to say to you must be spoken to your ear alone."

"It is absolutely necessary?"

"Yes," replied the seeress, decidedly.

"Have I your permission to leave you for a few moments?" Montgomery asked, speaking to the fair girl upon his arm. "I confess that this mysterious messenger from the other world has excited my curiosity."

"Certainly," replied the lady, withdrawing her arm from his.

"But wait a moment!" cried Montgomery, to the White Witch, who had turned to lead the way to the balcony, "are

"Quite," responded the masked figure, promptly; "you are Mr. Angus Montgomery, and your companion is Miss Frances Chauncy."

"She does know us," said Montgomery, in the young girl's ear. "Can you guess who she is?"

"No, I do not think that I have ever heard her voice before," said the blonde beauty, slowly.

"I confess it puzzles me, for her voice is not familiar to me either," Montgomery said, thoughtfully.

"I am waiting," said the clear tones of the oracle.

"A thousand pardons," cried Montgomery, quickly; excuse me, please, for a few moments" he said to Frances, with a bow, then through the group of maskers he followed the mysterious figure, dressed all in white, to the balcony.

The clear rays of the summer moon shone down upon the balcony almost as light as day.

Montgomery's curiosity had been strangely excited by the mysterious announcement made by the "White Witch" as she had termed herself, and he was determined to carry out the joke, for such he considered it.

The balcony was almost deserted. A few couples only strolled up and down, enjoying the cool ocean breeze.

The White Witch led the way to a remote corner of the broad plaza, and there she halted.

Montgomery had followed her without hesitation.

"All things are fitting for a mystic disclosure," said the young man, gayly, as they halted. "It is the 'witching hour when churchyards yawn'—the moonbeams are shining full upon us, and I, with becoming gravity, wait to hear my fate."

"Would to heaven, Angus Montgomery, that other lips than mine could tell you of that fate," said the mysterious figure, in low and mournful tones.

In spite of himself, Montgomery was impressed by the tone in which she spoke.

For a moment the young man looked at the white figure before him in silent amazement, then at last he said :

"I am waiting to hear my fate."

"And you have no fear?"

"No, why should I fear?"

"Your past life has been all sunshine?"

"Yes."

"But in the future—"

"Well, what of the future?"

"The clouds of misfortune gather heavily around you!"

"So that the sun shines through the clouds in the end, what care I?" said Montgomery, firmly.

"At present you are happy?"

"Yes."

"And why are you happy?" asked the strange figure, earnestly.

"That is, possibly, a difficult question to answer."

"I will answer it for you."

"Do."

"In the first place you have plenty of money."

"That's the key-note to nearly all human hearts," said Montgomery, scornfully. "You are right to put money first."

"You have warm and devoted friends."

"Yes."

"One friend particularly, whom you love as a brother—Tulip Roche."

"Again you are right. Tulip is like a brother to me, and I think that—brother-like—he would peril his life to serve me," Montgomery said, quickly.

"Money and friendship—what else is wanting to complete your happiness?" asked the White Witch, significantly.

"Well, if you can not tell, you are not half a witch!" exclaimed the young man.

"Love."

"That is the answer."

"And you find that love in the heart of Frances Chauncy?"

"Now you are touching upon a delicate subject," said Montgomery, gravely. "Speak as you like about my money and my friends, but I would prefer that you should not mention Miss Chauncy. The relation that I bear in regard to that lady, is such that I can not permit her name to be made the subject of a masquerading jest."

"You will find that the jest is bitter, earnest truth, before many days are over," replied the masked woman, in solemn tones.

"I am really losing patience!" exclaimed Montgomery; "if you have ought to say to me, please say it at once, and let me return to the ball-room."

"I am speaking of the present that I may speak of the future. You are rich, beloved, happy?" questioned the sibyl.

"Yes."

"Now, listen to my words. Your riches will take to themselves wings and fly away; the friend that you have taken to your breast and cherished like a brother, will turn upon and sting you; the woman that you love will prove false to you. Wealth, friendship, love, all will desert you."

"What!" cried the young man, indignantly, and a frown was upon the brow that the mask hid.

"Time will prove my words to be truth," said the White Witch, in a clear, firm voice.

"Lady, you are going altogether too far," and a trace of anger was in Montgomery's voice as he spoke; "too far even for a masquerading jest. I would stake my life upon the faith of the woman that I love."

"Oh, matchless folly!" exclaimed the mysterious woman, in a tone of scorn. "Do you not know that all women are not angels—that some are as unstable as water, as fickle and as changeable as the wind?"

"And who are you that tell me this?" demanded Montgomery, astonished at her words and manner.

"I have already told you I am The White Witch. Whether I am your good genius or your evil angel, time alone will tell. I may be friend or I may be foe; but mark my words, within one month, or one year, you will lose wealth, friends and love. All will desert you. Frances Chauncy loves your money and your station; not you. When the blows fall thick and heavy upon your head, remember the words of the White Witch."

Then she glided from the balcony, and entered the ball-room. For a moment Montgomery panted in astonishment, then followed her; but she had disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

FORMING THE LEAGUE.

VANLY Montgomery searched amid the groups that crowded the ball-room; the strange woman attired all in white was not to be found.

Montgomery was puzzled.

"This may be a joke," he muttered to himself, "but it is a very strange one."

A hand laid upon his shoulder interrupted the young man's meditations.

Turning, Montgomery saw at his side a tall figure dressed in the loose, white garb of a Pierrot—the French clown.

"Well, Montgomery, how are you enjoying yourself?" said a genial voice, coming from beneath the long, pointed nose of the white mask that the new-comer wore.

By the voice, Montgomery recognized who it was that addressed him.

"Is that you, O'Connell?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the other, removing his mask, and displaying the face of a man of thirty.

The face was a bold and handsome one; regular in outline, clear red-and-white in color, lit up by a pair of full blue eyes; eyes so darkly blue that, at a few paces off, they looked like black. Crispy curls of a rich golden hue clustered around the shapeless head.

The broad, expansive forehead, and the firm-set, resolute mouth, showed both brains and will. There was a lurking devil in the large blue eye that told of man's fiery passions.

Lionel O'Connell—the stranger in white was—no common man. An Irishman by birth, he had but lately come to the land that offers a home to the oppressed of every nation.

By profession, O'Connell was a writer, and was attached to the "staff" of a justly-celebrated daily newspaper.

The young Irishman wielded a brilliant and vigorous pen, and was already spoken of as one of the "rising men" of the "Fourth Estate," as the mighty men of the "Press-gang" are termed.

There was a mystery, too, about O'Connell that served to attract attention to him.

Of course every one was aware that his salary could not be large—for, as a general rule, there is more fame than money in the newspaper world—yet, somehow, he contrived to live in most excellent style. Always possessed of ample means, he spent his money with a lavish hand. None of the "bloods" with whom he associated—for O'Connell had contrived to introduce himself into the first circles in New York—were more princely in their expenditures.

When questioned sometimes by some curious friend as to how he could afford to be so extravagant, he would laugh carelessly, and vaguely speak of his family estates across the water. And so at last it came to be currently believed that he was the heir to some vast property in Ireland, and that his present way of life was merely a whim, such as is often indulged in by men who are independent of the world.

So Lionel O'Connell, though a worker for his bread in the great hive of life known as New York city, was well received by men of breeding and of wealth, who scorned to soil their dainty fingers with the stains of oil.

O'Connell was a man who possessed wondrous powers of fascination. Men were attracted to him by some subtle instinct that they could neither understand nor resist.

Young and beautiful women, the belles of the fashionable world, bestowed their sweetest smiles upon the dashing young Irishman.

Yet he did not seem conscious of this power that he possessed, and often spoke with wonder of the ease with which he made friends.

"A thorough good fellow—no man's enemy." Such was the opinion of the world.

"Yes," O'Connell replied to Montgomery's speech.

"I'm enjoying myself very well, but I'm a little puzzle just now."

"At what?" O'Connell asked.

"Listen and I'll tell you. I suppose that it's only a joke, but I don't like such jokes. As I was promenading with a lady a few minutes ago, I was accosted by a woman dressed all in white, who, in reply to my question, said she was called the White Witch. She asked for a few minutes' conversation with me alone. I followed her out on the balcony, and there she predicted that all sorts of misfortunes were going to come down thick and heavy upon my head. Mind you, this was all said in sober earnest; there didn't seem to be the least bit of a joke about it. Then she returned to the ball-room. I followed the moment after, but she had disappeared as suddenly as she appeared, and I can not find any trace of her."

"What were the evils with which she threatened you?" asked O'Connell, an earnest look in his eyes despite his efforts to appear unconcerned.

"The loss of wealth, of friends, and the woman I love."

O'Connell could not repress a slight start when Montgomery's words fell upon his ears.

"I see that you, too, are astonished," continued Montgomery.

"Yes, naturally so," replied the young Irishman, carelessly. "Did you not recognize this person?"

"No; she is, I think, a stranger to me. The voice was not familiar."

"Well, it is odd, to say the least," said O'Connell, thoughtfully.

"Yes; I'd give something to find out what it is."

"Oh, it's only a joke."

"Yes, but I don't like such jokes," Montgomery said, seriously. And as he spoke, he caught sight of the blonde beauty dressed as "Morning" coming toward him.

"Will you excuse me?" he said to O'Connell, hastily. "I see that I am wanted."

Then Montgomery joined Miss Chauncy, and drawing her arm in his, was soon lost to the eyes of O'Connell in the crowd.

Miss Chauncy was quite eager to know what the strange white mask had said to her lover, but Montgomery evaded the question. He did not tell the blonde beauty of the strange prediction of the White Witch.

After Montgomery left him, O'Connell remained motionless for a few moments, absorbed in thought. It was evident that his musings were not pleasant ones, for a shadow was on his face.

"I can not understand it," he muttered, at length. "The words of the White Witch are strange to Montgomery, but doubly so to me, that am behind the curtain. Is it merely a masquerading joke, without meaning, or has some unknown power guessed the secret thoughts—not even yet translated into words—that are swelling in my brain? It must be a coincidence. How could any one guess my purpose? I have not yet begun to lay the train by which the mine is to be exploded. I must to work, though, at once. Now for my tools; the hands who are to do the work that my brain plans."

Bandman, as he said, piled his paddle as he had never piled it before. It was with the feeling that he would overtake and look more clearly upon her face, even if it cost him his life.

He saw, too, after going a short distance in this furious manner, that he was really gaining upon the Princess—very slowly, it is true, but unmistakably nevertheless. She, too, was using her ear with extraordinary power, and the two boats shot forward with surprising velocity.

The canoes were as near the center of the stream as might be, and each was heading

"There they are," he said, and a smile came over his face. "The two who in serving their own ends, serve mine. We three, separate, are powerless; together, with my head to guide, we are a host."

O'Connell replaced his mask and walked slowly over to where the two stood that had noticed.

They were Tulip Roche and Herman Stoll.

The two, busy in conversation, did not notice the approach of O'Connell.

Just as O'Connell came up, Montgomery and Miss Chauncy, arm in arm, chatting gayly together, walked past.

"There they go again," said Stoll, and a muttered curse against Montgomery was smothered by the mask that covered his lips.

"A pretty couple," said O'Connell, in his easy way, coming quite close to the two.

"Hello! Con!" exclaimed Stoll, in his coarse way.

"Hullo." He had recognized the voice of the Irishman.

"I say that they are a very pretty couple," repeated O'Connell.

"Who?" said Stoll.

"Why the two that you just referred to, Mr. Angus Montgomery and Miss Frances Chauncy. Don't you agree with me? If you don't, Stoll, I am sure that Tulip here will. Every one knows how like brothers he and Angus are, and of course, brother-like, he thinks the world of Miss Chauncy. I suppose you will act as Angus' best man, ch. Tulip?"

Had the mask been torn, suddenly, from the face of Tulip Roche, the action would have revealed features white with rage.

But Tulip's secret was hid by the mask, so he held his place and said nothing.

"Montgomery is a lucky fellow, isn't he?" continued O'Connell. "Rich as an Astor, handsome as a picture, and loved by an angel in the guise of this blonde beauty, what else is wanting to complete his happiness?"

"You speak of the fellow as if he were a god," said Stoll, lowering his voice.

"I have only spoken truth, given one side of the picture. Told of Angus Montgomery, rich and beloved. I have not yet said anything about his three enemies, now standing in this ball-room, who will pull him down from his pinnacle of triumph, give his money to the winds and tear from him the love of the woman that he fondly fancies is all his own."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Stoll, in astonishment, and Tulip's eyes, too, asked the question.

"Exactly what I say," replied O'Connell, coolly. "That Angus Montgomery has three deadly enemies standing almost within ear-shot of him. Three men who will rob him of everything that he holds dear in this world."

Tulip and Stoll looked at each other in wonder.

For a moment there was silence. The two seemed to be considering the strange words of O'Connell.

"Montgomery has three enemies?" said Stoll.

"Yes," replied O'Connell.

"Who are they?"

"The first is called Tulip Roche; the second, Herman Stoll; and the third, Lionel O'Connell."

The two men started as though they had received an electric shock when the Irishman pronounced their names.

"What the deuce do you mean, Con?" asked Stoll; hastily. "I am not aware that I am an enemy of Mr. Montgomery."

"Nor I," said Tulip, slowly.

"Gentlemen, let us lay our cards upon the table; it is better that we should see each other's hand, for we must play partners and not against each other in this game," said O'Connell, coolly. "I, for one, hate this Angus Montgomery; you hate him, too

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"She must be insane, and must hold a powerful influence over these Indians; that doubtless is the reason she is called a princess, and then her way of dressing in white and painting her canoe that color, and her extraordinary skill in handling the paddle, has given her the name of the Phantom Princess among the superstitious hunters and trappers of this region."

Then he suddenly thought of the company of North-west trappers that had gone ahead of him to this village. What had become of them? Most likely, after finding that they had been outwitted, he had continued on down the river, knowing it was too late to return, and overtake the offending party that had discredited them.

Again his thoughts came back to her who was the cause of this calamity of his.

"There is a method in insanity, and there must have been some powerful cause to turn her mind in this direction. She must have received some terrible wrong at the hands of her people to cause her to turn with such implacable hatred upon them.

"Who can she be?

"She would not give me her name. All I know is that she has a child with her, whom she claims as her daughter. Where, then, is the father of the girl? Can it be that his treatment of her was such as to change her feelings toward all her race, and to cause so many innocent to suffer?

"So it seems to me," he added, as he continued the train of thought. "Sh!"

A slight rustling caused him to turn his head; the Phantom Princess was before him!

CHAPTER XII.

FACE TO FACE IN THE DEATH-LODGE.

HUGH BANDMAN sprang to his feet, and confronted the woman who had entered the lodge. He was pale, and quivering like an aspen, while she stood as immobile as a statue of ice. He stared like a man who had lost his senses. His breath came through his closed teeth as though he were choking. He could only gasp, "My heavens!" and then he sank back senseless upon the skins behind him.

The Phantom Princess still did not stir. She was dressed in the same white, ghostly robes, and her large dark eyes were fixed upon him, as though they would pierce him through and through.

In a few minutes his strong nature reasserted itself, and he roused up again. Rising to a sitting position, he groaned:

"Oh, Myra! Myra! do I dream, or is it you indeed?"

Then she spoke, in the low, terrible tones of intense passion:

"Yes, it is I, Myra—she whom you once called your wife. I am not crazy, as you imagine. I saw you when you came with the party the other day; I knew you; I felt that my day of revenge had come; Providence had opened the way, and I knew that you would be thrown into my power. I followed you; I drew you on—and you are here; and when you leave this place, you go to your death!"

While she was speaking, she stood with hand uplifted, as though pronouncing judgment upon him. He could only reach his arms imploringly toward her, and moan his agony, which was too great for words.

"Your perfidy toward me has caused me to hate the face of all of my race; and the hate of a dozen years is all centered upon YOU. It is I who brought you here—it is I who will delight in your suffering and death; let that thought fill your last moments upon earth. I now bid you good-bye!"

With the air of an empress, she turned to walk out. She had reached the entrance, when the miserable man found his voice.

"Myra, wait one moment!"

"Well?" she said, pausing and half-turning round, but making no motion to return.

"Come back, I command you; you must listen to me."

"I can hear what you have to say without coming nearer you."

"If you are in your right mind, tell me—I implore—why you left me in London."

"Tell you why I left you?" she repeated, her whole being consumed with scorn. "Why do you ask such an idle question? Must I refer to the time when you won my heart—when I gave you my love, and when I stood beside you at the altar, secretly but lawfully married, as I believed, in obedience to a request of yours; and then, when I discovered, a week later, that you had deceived me—that I was not your wife—from a postscript that I fled from you as from a pestilence?"

"Was that why you left me?"

"Was not that a thousand reasons? Disgraced, dishonored, was I to remain in London, with no friend in the world? No; God restrained me from suicide, but I left the country forever; I came upon my uncle's vessel to Fort Churchill; there I remained until my daughter was born, and then I fled into the woods. I found my way, after many weary days and nights of suffering, to these people. They had pity upon me; they treated me kindly, and with them I have lived ever since, and with them I expect to die. I have befriended no white man—none excepting Nick Whiffles, who is different from others of his race, and who was so kind to me that I can feel no hatred toward him."

"But I am the enemy of all others, and to no one am I such an enemy as to you. You are now in my power; you have tasted of a woman's love, and now you shall taste of a woman's HATE!"

Singularly enough, Hugh Bandman was now quite cool and self-possessed. It was an unnatural calm, but it was a calm nevertheless.

"Myra, before bidding each other farewell," said he, as he leaned upon his elbow, "we may as well understand each other. I will answer any question you may propose, and will you do the same for me?"

"Let me hear them," she replied, standing as motionless as before, but the picture of the intensest excitement.

"By what means did you learn that you were not my wife?"

"What matters it how I learned it, so that I did learn it?"

"You have not answered me. Was it through Richard McCabe?"

"It was."

"What proof did he give you?"

"He brought me a note from the man who had acted the part of minister in marrying us. He repented the part he had played in being your agent, and begged me to do what I could not—forgive him."

"You did not see the man, Mr. Dumfries, himself?"

"He had not the courage to show his face

—so he sent the note; that told all—was not that enough?"

"Did it never occur to you that you might have been deceived?"—that Mr. Dumfries did not write or send you the note?"

"Do you not know what you mean?"

"To be brief then, Mr. John Dumfries was a regularly-ordained minister of the Church of England; you are my lawful wife, and he never sent you a note or a word to the contrary."

"But I have the note with me," said she, turning about, and walking toward him.

"Let me see it," said Bandman, with that same wonderful coolness of manner, as he reached out his hand for it.

She hesitated for a moment, and then, walking a step or two nearer, flung it at him, as though she could not trust herself to approach any higher.

"Were I in a civilized country, I would not trust you with it, but it can make no difference now."

Hugh Bandman picked up the folded bit of paper, and opened it. It had been carefully preserved, and he read it without difficulty. When he had finished, he folded it up again and threw it toward her.

"Just what I expected—that is in the handwriting of Richard McCabe, and he wrote it on purpose to destroy your happiness and mine."

"I will not believe it—it can not be true!"

was the impetuous exclamation of the Phantom Princess, advancing still closer.

"Somehow or other, I have always fancied that you and I would meet again in this life, and I have always gone prepared for it, as you will shortly perceive. Listen, then, Myra, to a few words of mine:

"Richard McCabe was an admirer and lover of yours, before I saw you. He did all he could to win you, but failing and finding that you and I were plighted, he still sought to prevent our marriage. He went to you, with whisperings against me, but you scorned him; he came to me, with insinuations against you, and I thrust him out of the house. I thought that that was the last of him, so far as concerned us, but it was not. A week after our marriage, I came home one evening to find that you had fled. You had left no word of explanation behind you, so that I had not the slightest suspicion of why or where you had gone. I could only believe that you had gone off in some mental aberration, and a number of the best detectives were put upon your track. They learned nothing of what had become of you, and I came to the conclusion that you were dead in the Thames."

"Not the slightest suspicion of the true cause of your absence had come to me. My marriage was a secret from my friends, for the simple reason that I lacked a few months of reaching my majority, and was not yet legally my own master. A few of my intimate friends were in the secret, and one evening when McCabe was rather the worse for the wine he had drunk, he said something that roused the most dreadful suspicion in my mind. I could not get much out of him, but enough to satisfy me that you were hiding somewhere, under the belief that I had done you some great wrong."

"The few words that I got from him, were uttered accidentally. When he was himself I taxed him with it, but he had no recollection of what he had said, and denied all knowledge of you in the most solemn manner. Nevertheless his appearance convinced me of his guilt, and I employed a man to watch."

"McCabe did not know at this time whether you had gone, but he had a suspicion, and he discovered it at last, and he followed you. When my man found that he had embarked for North America in one of the Hudson Bay Company ships, he became satisfied that you had done the same some weeks before.

"When he told me this, I remembered you had an uncle who was the captain of one of their vessels, and there could no longer be any doubt of the direction you had taken. Prudence would have suggested that I wait until his return, and learn the truth from him, but that would have necessitated a delay of several months, which would have driven me mad, so I set sail in the very next vessel that left for this country."

"We encountered the 'Albatross' as we entered Baffin's Bay, and I went on deck and saw your uncle. He told me his lips were sealed, and refused to answer me any questions at all, even after I had made him understand that you had been deceived."

"I had no doubt at all that you were at Fort Churchill, but I did hope to gain some particulars of him; but I did not, and so we separated."

"While entering Hudson's Bay, we were caught in a tempest and wrecked. We lived on that barren coast for several months, and then were picked up and carried to Ungava. It was then a long time before I could get across to Fort Churchill.

"I succeeded at last—but when I reached the place, a year and more had passed since you left London."

"At Fort Churchill, I learned that you had been there, and that a child had been born. You had received the kindest treatment, but when the short, beautiful summer came, you had escaped and fled no one knew whether I had lived ever since, and with them I expect to die. I have befriended no white man—none excepting Nick Whiffles, who is different from others of his race, and who was so kind to me that I can feel no hatred toward him."

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inner breast-pocket, and handed it to her. She took it mechanically and opened it.

She read it carefully, and saw that it was a legal certificate of her marriage, properly witnessed, and signed by Rev. Mr. Dumfries, who had officiated in the capacity of minister at the time.

All this she saw. Then that wild, fierce, born of long-suffering and hate, died out, and, in its stead, came a deadly pallor to the face—the pallor of despair. A cry bubbled up from her lips like that of a mother over her lost darling. Her arm, outstretched, moved to and fro as if to dissolve some horrid vision, and her staring eyes glared in their intense gaze on vacancy, as she wailed:

"Doomed—doomed! and by my act! Oh, Hugh—darling Hugh! My hand has brought him to this—my hand!" she sobbed, holding out before her that beautiful white hand.

"He never wronged me—he loved me, but I do not know what you mean."

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demigod, at the very least, for who but a more than human man could breathe such perfect devotion to woman? who render her such touchingly, tender tribute?

Then she had met him, and loved!

This morning, too, before the time-honored festival of St. Valentine, she was deciding to send him an anonymous valentine, because her very heart ached with the wish that his hand, his eye might rest, if but for a moment, upon something she had freighted with her kisses.

So they lay around her, the fair silver and golden-winged court messengers of Cupid, ready to do any bidding assigned.

"From Ormsby's, Jones, you brought them?"

She glanced at the man as he brought in the steaming chicken fricassee.

Then, after a careful examination, she selected one; an exquisitely elegant silver page, with a faint azure hue near the center, that took gradual form of interlaced hearts, graced by a tiny little hand, with a ring on the finger. Underneath was written, in a faultlessly beautiful hand, the words: "Je vous aime. Maimez-vous!"

"I have heard that Mr. Clyde greatly admires Italian penmanship. Let me try to address this like the inscription within, both because he likes it, and to mislead him."

So the fated valentine went on its way, and several hours later Gordon Van Blascom sent to her; he who had made up his mind, long ago, when Sophy Blair's health failed him, to seek to win this beautiful icicle.

This Valentine's day, the witching time, sacred to love and love's successes, was the season that Gordon Van Blascom had selected to tell Geneva St. Cyril his—we will not call it love—his purposes.

It was a model love-letter she read that morning, wherein her suitor plead nobly and boldly; then when she laid it in a perfumed box, and remembered he was to come for his answer on the morrow evening, she smiled as she thought how she despised him when she compared him with Vernon Clyde.

So she waited for a chance answer from her valentine; and Gordon Van Blascom waited for the news that should forever set him at rest on the wife and wealth question.

Vernon Clyde's light, pleasant apartment was cheerful even in the gloom of a driving snow-storm. The grate held a crackling fire in its iron grasp; the carpet grew redder and brighter in the glow; the elegant chairs and sofa looked the very impersonation of comfort, as they certainly were of grace and style; and at his desk, his head bent between his hands, Vernon Clyde sat, earnestly gazing at an open valentine that lay before him; a silver love-affair, with the sweet words, "Je vous aime. Maimez-vous?" deliberately transcribed in a chirography that made his heart beat quicker as he thought of the fair hand he knew had penned it.

He loved her so, sweet Sophy Blair, on whose table in the little front room he had seen this very sheet of paper before it had gone to Ormsby's. He remembered reading the words, and wishing it were for him.

And now, now, Sophy, in this charming way, that he might accept or reject, had sent him an encouragement to win her!

With a heart overflowing with bliss and new-born joys, he drew paper to him and wrote her a letter; just such a letter as his heroes had written to their sweethearts; such a letter as only a poet soul could write or appreciate; a letter that Geneva St. Cyril would have given her very life for.

This he sent; and directed the boy not to wait for an answer. Then he lighted his student-lamp, and went back into the writer's dream-world, where all things are so beautiful. Twenty minutes later the boy returned, with a hastily scribbled note.

"MR. CLYDE—I am too indignant to express correctly my thoughts. To think you should accuse me of sending you such a valentine is sufficient to render null whatever protestations you may have made." SOPHY BLAIRE."

That was the end of his exquisite dream: wounded, heart-sick, sore, disappointed, he folded away the letter with solemn, sacred tenderness; then leaned over his desk again, while Sophy watched the graceful shadow on the curtains with tear-pearled eyes, hating herself, for her cruel, impulsive note, and wondering why Fate denied her every thing.

At the elegant mansion on Murray Hill, Geneva St. Cyril was half-expecting, half-hoping an answer, one that never came to her; then, when, after a day and night of ceaseless thought upon it, she had taught herself the lesson that if he had loved her, Vernon Clyde would have replied ere this, she calmly, coldly, made up her mind, if there came from him no sign by the evening, she would marry Gordon Van Blascom, whether or no. Other women married where there was not love, might not she?

And so, when burners were blazing in the parlor that night, Geneva, in her trailing ruby velvet robes, sat, waiting to promise to be Gordon Van Blascom's wife, with cold heart, tearless eyes, and white cheeks.

It was very strange, she thought, that he did not come; then she wondered what kept him, and retired to her room with a strange, vague presentiment of coming doom.

The next morning early there came a note; a strange affair, that was half-inexplicable, half-terrible.

"MY DARLING SOPHY:

"If you will permit such a wicked wretch as I to call you so once more, I have come back to my allegiance. Take me, will you, Sophy, and let me love you, as of yore! Forgive me the past, and let the future atone. I wait for the answer that will bring me to your side, my own dearest. Perhaps I had better say, before I send you this, that if any rumor has reached you of my attentions to Miss St. Cyril, you may regard them as worthless. She can never be more than my friend."

"GORDON VAN B."

With eyes like freezing stars, Miss St. Cyril folded up the letter, and smiled.

"A fortunate case of misdirecting a lover-letter."

While in the little front room on the Sixth avenue, Sophy Blair sat, half laughing, half crying, wholly indignant, over two letters that lay before her.

One was as follows:

"MISS GENEVRA:
"In all humility, I beg leave to withdraw from your consideration the proposals made yesterday. I thank you for permitting me to offer them, and I hope you will pardon my conduct."

GORDON VAN BLASCOM.

"P. S. I have, on second thoughts, deemed it but just to you to explain that a previous engagement to a Miss Blair, that I had learned to regard as a thing only of the past, is my honorable excuse."

G. VAN B."

Sophy tossed it away with a curling lip;

then, with joyously-throbbing heart, read a communication from an attorney, stating that the absconding partner had been found, and, very luckily, a large portion of the funds had been invested safely, so that Mrs. Blair and daughter were raised to their old position. The name of the man was given as Brown, whose daughter, a charmingly beautiful girl, known as Miss St. Cyril, was enjoying the ill-gotten gains. The lawyer's note was dated from the same building in which Gordon Van Blascom had an office, where he probably heard the news, and wrote to Sophy, hoping to forestall the announcement of the attorney.

Inclosing his letter in an envelope, Sophy returned it, without a word.

His surprise, rage and disgust were boundless. He had overstepped his mark, as he saw; and when in after days he learned that Geneva St. Cyril was an heiress in her own right, after all, and not the person referred to by the lawyer, being another of the same name, his wrath was terrible, but fruitless.

And Sophy?

Straight to her desk she went, and wrote a line:

"DEAREST VERNON:
"Will you forgive me, and love me still? Come to me, and let me tell you all."

And the answer came back:

"Mr. Clyde had gone away the night before to stay till the next autumn!"

Down on the rocky beach at Newport, with her sweet, winsome eyes searching the blue expanse of rippling waters, Sophy was sitting, thinking, as she always thought, of Vernon Clyde; where he was, and if she ever would see him again. They had been lonely days, and weeks, and months without him, and her young heart had sometimes grown sick with "hope deferred," and now, on that bright, warm, breezy August day, she was sitting among the rocks, with the prayer in her heart that she might see him.

And then—a step; a silence; then her name was spoken, lowly, thrillingly, half fearfully; she sprang to her feet; one glance told her it was he. Then she sunk in a thankful joy to her knees, with Vernon Clyde's arm around her, his hand clasping hers.

And, with the solemn-sounding sea breaking on the rocks, it was righted between them forever.

genuine joy that the sailor responded to his old employer's request, to take his old ship—the Rover—to sea once more.

Mr. Fleming was seated in his large armchair, but arose as the stately old skipper unconcernedly entered the library.

"Glad to see you, captain, and as I suppose you wish to spend this, your last night, at home, I'll not keep you long."

"Bless your soul, sir!" returned the captain, bluntly. "I've told the old woman, and my house full of brats—dear brats, heaven bless 'em! I've said good-by to 'em all, and I sleep on the Rover to-night! I never break an old custom, and this is one," and the skipper seated himself, as if perfectly at home.

"Then, it's all very good, captain; we can talk at our leisure. But, first, take a little wine, and then, having made out the papers, we'll have a talk." As he spoke, the merchant drew a decanter toward him. He was about pouring the rich red liquor into a cut-glass wine-cup, when a noise was heard out by the rear window; then the cracking snap of a breaking twig.

Mr. Fleming sprang to the window, hurried open the shutters, and looked out. But the night was inky dark, and the old man could neither see nor hear any thing. He heard out, and peered around in every direction. Then he took in his head, slowly lowered the sash, and returned to his seat.

"Do you fear listeners, sir?" asked the captain.

"Yes, no—that is, not exactly; but I have my reasons for being cautious. You, captain, and my daughter"—the old man's voice trembled—"are all who possess my dreadful secret!"

"Tis as safe with me, Mr. Fleming, as if I did not know it. I am aware of your situation, sir, and—I'm sorry for you!"

"Thank you! thank you!" murmured the poor merchant; "I know that you are sincere, captain—that you are an honest man. A staunch friend is rare nowadays, captain."

"As true as my name is Jack Kelson!"

There was a pause for some moments—the skipper occasionally slipping the generic wine, and Arthur Fleming, perturbed, and uneasy, glancing over a pile of papers.

At length the old man looked up.

"There they are, captain, all arranged," he said. "And now, is the Rover—God bless the old craft—is she all ready for the

Her anchor was already hove up, and a hawser had just been passed aboard from the "Canonicus," the steamer which was to tow the large ship down to the sea.

At exactly a quarter-past eleven, the wheels of the tug revolved, the hawser tautened, and the good ship Rover followed her small conductor obediently, and glided smoothly away.

The tea-ship had fairly started on her long voyage, to end, whether prosperously or disastrously, no one could tell.

From the cupola of his towering mansion, Arthur Fleming and Madeleine watched through a glass, the large ship fading away.

Fenton Thorne, the collegian, stood by them.

Silently, turn by turn, father and daughter continued to gaze after the Rover, until the dark smoke from the chimney of the tug, and the towering spars of the great ship, were hid behind the heavily-wooded headlands, far away, toward Newport.

And the prayers of father and daughter went up in a united petition to Him who rules the storm, for the safety, success and return of the gallant old tea-ship.

But Fenton Thorne knew not the earnestness of those prayers.

That afternoon, at four o'clock, when just below Newport, the Rover cast off from the friendly hawser, then let drop her own snow-white pinions to the rising wind. In an hour afterward, with a green, foaming sea before her, and a spanking breeze abaf, the old ship sped by Point Judith, and dashed away over the rolling, white-capped billows.

One week after the departure of the tea-ship, Madeleine Fleming received a letter, written in a miserable, scrawling chirography—letter, whose contents she read and re-read, as she covertly scrutinized the little ragged urchin who brought the missive.

The girl hesitated for a while; her father was not at home, and she was, from necessity, her own counselor. But, though merely a maiden, yet the girl had a warm, tender woman's heart, and an ear ever open to the cry of the unfortunate, or the pleadings of charity.

She did not ponder long, but taking a slip of paper, hastily scribbled a few lines in pencil, and handed it to the little boy, giving him at the same time a few pennies to make glad his poor, forlorn heart.

As the two persons cleared the road, Stephen Smith coughed aloud.

Almost instantly a small jet of flame leaped out ahead from the bushes, a bullet dashed the sand of the path, in the Kentuckian's face, and a sharp report rung out on the air.

But Stephen Smith did not start. He simply exclaimed:

"Look out there, or you'll shoot somebody!"

As he spoke, the two figures emerged from the brush, and struck rapidly across the common.

Stephen Smith smiled to himself, but said nothing.

"That was a narrow escape, Mr. Smith," said Madeleine, trembling in every limb. "People should be more careful with firearms."

"The truth is, Miss Madeleine," replied the student, gravely, "some people don't care; they should be taught better. But, come; where is the house of this poor woman? I do not see it."

"Nor I; and, Mr. Smith, I think I'll try again to-morrow. 'Tis dark now."

"You are wise, Miss Madeleine; we'll return. But you are tired; we'll see if that carriage yonder is engaged."

By this time Madeleine had trustingly slipped her arm into Stephen Smith's. The two walked toward the carriage.

"Are you engaged?" asked the Kentuckian of the driver, who was half-dozing on his seat.

"Yes; for lady and gentleman," was the short reply.

"All right; we are here," said the student, promptly.

The driver stared at the answer, and at the big basket, but simply adjusted his reins and asked:

"Where to?"

"Mr. Arthur Fleming's, North Main street," replied Stephen Smith, as he handed in his charge, and followed with the basket, himself.

"Very good, sir; I know the house."

The driver cracked his whip, and they rolled away.

Madeleine wondered; her head seemed light—she almost fancied herself in a dream. But she said nothing.

Stephen Smith was unusually quiet; he was thinking.

Fifteen minutes passed, and the carriage which had been driven at a rapid rate, drew up before the entrance of the Fleming mansion.

Silently the student assisted the maiden to alight. Then he handed the driver some coins; the man, touching his hat at the unexpected bounty, for he had already been paid, drove away.

"Come in, Mr. Smith—do," plead Madeleine.

But the collegian excused himself, and after placing the basket within the gate, bowed, and strode away toward College street.

"You are ushered, Ralph Ross! I held too strong a hand; though, if the truth be told, you're *knew* enough for a dozen pack's! Strange, ay, *very* strange! You had better not been born, black-hearted villain, than to have raised your hand against my life!"

The student strode on.

CHAPTER XIX.

"WHAT THE STARS SAY."

"WELL, well, my good woman, that matters not! Tell me your price, and if reasonable, I will pay it."

"Nay, nay, miss; you're in a hurry, and unreasonable. You ask a great deal at my hands. It will not do for me to engage in deception, else it may be denied to me to read what the stars say."

"Nonsense!" and the closely-veiled lady stamped her foot impatiently. "What care I what the stars say, and whether or not you can read them! I want your assistance; I will pay for it."

"But I tell you again," interrupted the other, decidedly, "that, unless your purposes are honest, you will fail!"

"Are they not honest?" exclaimed the veiled woman, angrily.

"'Tis no business of mine, and I know not what is what's right."

"Tush! tush!" said the other; "you talk idly and not to the purpose. I'll not listen to your nonsense. Nay, do not interrupt me, for time is precious. I am here on business. Tell me what you demand for aiding me, and how much, in addition, for keeping a secret. Speak out; remember, business is



The College Rivals: or, THE BELLE OF PROVIDENCE.

BY DR. WM. MASON TURNER.

AUTHOR OF \$50,000 REWARD, THE RUBY RING, MA-
BEL VANE, MASKED MINER, ETC.

business, and that the money will be easily earned."

The old woman leaned back, and casting her eyes aloft, seemed lost in some abstruse calculation.

Her face was a strange one—that old woman's—and contending passions were battling there.

But her visitor was getting impatient.

"Speak, madam!" she said, imperiously; "this can not require much thought."

The old woman slowly lowered her head.

"You are business-like, indeed!" she muttered, with a low, cackling laugh; "and I'll be as much so! Pay me twenty dollars in advance; you have my terms."

"Too much! Take ten—it overpays you; take it, or I go," and she turned toward the door.

"No, no; don't go. Wait a moment, and let me think. You're in too great a hurry."

"I'll wait a minute," and the visitor laid her hand upon the knob.

"I'll accept your offer," gasped the old woman, quickly.

"Good!" said the other, as if expecting such a result; "I will come to-morrow, and make my arrangements."

Without another word, she whisked out of the room into the street, omitting even to say good-morning.

This singular conversation took place in a small house, standing in the rear of a tenement on North Main street, near the gates of the cemetery. The door of that small, retired rear-house bore a large, old-fashioned brass plate. There was a name on that plate—a quaint, odd name.

Several weeks had now elapsed since the occurrence of the events as given in our last chapter; and the honored event in the aristocratic Fleming mansion—the birth-night of Madeleine—had passed uncelebrated.

Had it been forgotten?

The large house, on that usually auspicious evening, was closed; only one or two lights shone out from the huge pile, and they came from the dormitory of the servants.

The truth is, a week before the long-looked-for night, Arthur Fleming had told his daughter, with a sickly smile, a faint attempt at light-heartedness—for tears stood in his eyes—that he was—not exactly *blind* of celebrating those birth-nights; but he was afraid that his *guests* might tire of them!

Madeleine had bowed her head, and said nothing.

Her father had gone on to say that, therefore, instead of celebrating the occasion as of old, he and Madeleine would take a trip by rail, and have a winter view of Niagara Falls!

Madeleine had not raised the slightest objection to this plan; for she knew, though he failed to tell her in so many words, her father's reasons for this dark, midwinter journey.

The house, then, had been echoless and cheerless on this December evening. No flashing diamonds and gorgeous dresses, on this night, had passed beneath the radiance of the great chandeliers.

One week after the evening had passed, Arthur Fleming and his daughter returned—the old man seemingly happy, and Madeleine, too. The maiden, whatever were the clouds above her—sober or purple—was almost always happy. Fenton Thorne was her idol and treasure, and she owned him still, in the face of all adversity.

Since the eventful evening when Stephen Smith had accompanied Madeleine in search of the widow Chapman's out-of-the-way and never-found cottage, the Kentuckian had called once. He only made a passing allusion to the circumstance; and he expressed no surprise whatever when the girl informed him that she had gone next day to look for the poor woman, but had failed again in finding her or her house.

Stephen dryly suggested that perhaps the poor woman was too obscure a personage to be known by any one! But the young man did not volunteer to hunt for the widow Chapman; and Madeleine thought it a little strange that he failed to do so.

Between Stephen Smith, however, and Ralph Ross, hot, angry words had passed; and had it not been for some students standing by, it is more than probable the young men had come to blows. One thing is certain—Ralph Ross avoided Stephen, and would never, if possible, meet him face to face.

As has been said, several weeks had passed. One morning Madeleine sat in her father's library, sad and listless; for Fenton Thorne, for some cause, had absented himself longer than was customary with him.

As the girl sat there, the bell suddenly rung, and a letter was handed in.

Carelessly the maiden took the missive, and glanced at the superscription. As the strange handwriting—evidently masculine—fell upon her sight, Madeleine started. It was directed to herself.

She hastily tore open the envelope, and, with feelings we will not attempt to describe, read as follows:

"Miss Fleming,
I pardon the presumption of which I am guilty in addressing you. Though a stranger, yet, believe me, I am actuated solely, in writing to you, by the desire to do you a service. I know you by reputation, and by sight; but have never spoken with you. But I do know him, personally, whom rumor says to be your accepted lover. I know FENTON THORNE!"

"Pardon a few plain words, and though I sign no name to this communication, I beg you to accept my statements. I will be brief.

"Fenton Thorne is not true to you; he loves another woman; he has pledged his solemn troth to that woman; that woman is the beautiful Myra Hoxley. The young man has been so bold as to hint that your father is not—excuse me, if I give you pain—is not as rich as report would have him. Of course there is no foundation for such a report; but you will see that it has had some weight with Mr. Fenton Thorne. He has transferred his affections to Myra Hoxley—a fine girl, Miss Fleming, we must all admit, and rich, beyond dispute. Fenton Thorne is rich, too; but he is selfish! From an old acquaintance, I speak as I do. He would not wed the prettiest and most amiable girl in Providence, and all agree that you are such, unless she brought him a fortune. I do not ask you to be *rich*, but in order to do you a service, I must, as to the falsity of this fellow's professions to you. I ask you as you value your future happiness, to go and see a good old woman—a wise woman, living in the rear of No. —North Main street. You may not believe in clairvoyancy, or astrology, nor will we argue as to the merits of either; but go and see this old woman, who pretends at all events to be a clairvoyant, and a perfect reader of the stars. If you disregard this advice, evil will come of it. Seek the old woman at once, and tell her your errand. She will then tell you what the stars say."

A FRIEND."

The letter fell from Madeleine Fleming's hands, and a cold shiver passed over her frame. Her face at first flushed, and then grew as pale as death.

"Can it be true?" she moaned. "Oh, God! can I believe that Fenton Thorne is so false! No, no! But, Myra Hoxley! Alas! alas! . . . Nonsense! away doubts! I'll not distrust him. Oh! Fenton is mine, mine alone! Yet, this letter! Oh! heaven! I'll go mad! . . . I must see this woman! I'll seek her now!"

(To be continued—commenced in No. 44.)

RED ARROW,

The Wolf Demon: OR, THE QUEEN OF THE KANAWHA.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.
AUTHOR OF "ACE OF SPADES," "SCARLET HAND,"

CHAPTER XL.

THE FIGHT UNTO THE DEATH.

The two scouts looked upon the blood-stained cap with horror.

"The blood is fresh, too!" cried Boone. "Lark must have been killed by this man immediately after we missed him in the thicket."

"It looks like it," said Kenton solemnly.

"Let us seek for the body."

But as they were about to commence their search, the sound of footfalls approaching through the wood fell upon their ears.

"Hush!" cried Boone, grasping Kenton by the arm as he spoke; "do you hear that?"

"It's some one coming through the wood."

"Yes, and hyer all comers are enemies and not friends; let's to cover," said Boone.

A second after, the two woodmen were snuggly concealed in the bushes.

The steps came nearer and nearer, and then, through the gloom of the night, the watching eyes of the two saw the fearful form of the terrible Wolf Demon approaching.

He walked not now with stealthy tread but his step was heavy and slow. His head was bent down, low, upon his breast.

Slowly he came on, passed by the ambush of the scouts, then crossed the moonlit glade and entered the thicket on the opposite side. He was bending his steps in the direction of the Indian village of Chillicothe.

Ke-ne-ha-ha gazed with starting eyes upon the terrible figure.

"Let the chief prepare to die. He is the last Shawnee that will feel the edge of the tomahawk of the avenger," cried the deep voice.

With an effort, Ke-ne-ha-ha roused himself from the spell of terror that the appearance of the dreaded Wolf Demon had cast around him.

With a sudden bound, he seized his tomahawk, that had been, carelessly, cast upon the floor of the wigwam.

The Wolf Demon made no effort to prevent the chief from possessing himself of the weapon.

Tomahawk in hand, the foes faced each other.

Slowly they moved around the narrow circle of the wigwam, watching each other with wary eyes, each seeking an unguarded opening for an attack.

Thrice they made the circle of the lodge, the little fire, with its glimmering light, revealing their movements to each other.

Then with a spring like unto the panther in quickness and in force, the Wolf Demon leaped upon the Shawnee chief.

Ke-ne-ha-ha did not seek to parry the attack, but nimbly he evaded it by springing to one side.

The tomahawk of the Wolf Demon spent its force upon the air; and as he passed, the wily Indian dealt him a terrible stroke upon the head, that cut in deep through the wolf-skull, and felled him heavily to the earth.

A hoarse note of triumph came from the lips of the chief as he beheld the downfall of his foe. But his joy was of short duration, for like the ancient god of the fable that gathered strength from being cast to earth, the Wolf Demon rose to his feet.

The shock of the fall had torn the tomahawk from his hand, but he did not seek to regain the weapon.

With naked hands—weaponless—he faced the Shawnee chief. The blood streaming down freely over his face—over the black and white pigtments with which it was painted in horrid fashion—made him look like an evil spirit fresh from the fires below.

His eyes shot lurid flames as he glared upon the Shawnee warrior.

Ke-ne-ha-ha grasped his tomahawk with desperate energy and waited for the attack of the unarmed foe.

The Shawnee chieftain did not have long to wait.

With the spring of a tiger the Wolf Demon leaped upon the Indian.

Desperately Ke-ne-ha-ha struck at him with the tomahawk, but the Wolf Demon warded off the blows with his arm, and despite the efforts of the chief to prevent it, he closed in with him.

Sinewy and supple was the Shawnee warrior, yet he was but as a child in the powerful grasp of his terrible foe.

The Wolf Demon held him in a grip of iron. His arms, linked round the Indian like bands of steel, were crushing the life out of him little by little.

Vainly Ke-ne-ha-ha struggled to free himself from the anaconda coil.

Like the serpents of far-off India, wreathing its huge length around its prey, the Wolf Demon held the Shawnee chieftain in his grip.

The breath of the Indian came thick and hard.

Up and down in the narrow confines of the wigwam swayed the contending foes, like two venomous snakes coiled together.

Exerting all his strength, the Indian tried to break the grasp of the Wolf Demon. Vainly he struggled—vainly he tried. He felt that his strength was going fast.

Tight and tighter grew the grip of steel.

The Indian turned black in the face. The blood gushed from his mouth. He ceased to struggle. The grip relaxed and Ke-ne-ha-ha fell to the ground, dead.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LAST OF THE DEMON.

A look of triumph swept over the blood-stained face of the Wolf Demon as he looked upon the lifeless form of the Shawnee warrior.

From the cut in the head of the Wolf the blood was slowly trickling, but he did not seem to mind his hurt.

With a hoarse cry of joy he knelt by the side of the man whom he had strangled to death.

He tore the hunting-shirt from the breast of the dead chieftain; then he drew the dead man's knife from his girdle.

Three rapid slashes and the Red Arrow, graven in the flesh, was blazoned on the breast of the Shawnee warrior.

"Inhuman dog, more like the wolf in heart than I, thus do I mark you," the Wolf Demon cried, in a voice hoarse with passion.

"Eleven red demons slew the Red Arrow; eleven Shawnee warriors have I slain. Not one of the murdering band has escaped my steel. She fell in the blazing cabin amid the great green wood, near where the Muskingum waters laugh and play. The assassins have fallen in the glade and in the woodland, by the banks of the Scioto and the Ohio, in the paths of the Shawnee village and by the lodge-fires of the Chillicothe. I have struck them down by night and by day. And on each breast the tomahawk was raised to strike, when Le-a-pah bounded from the wood, and the Wolf Demon held his arm and fled from her like the night flies from the dawn."

Ke-ne-ha-ha listened, in amazement.

"The warrior has failed," he said slowly.

"Manitou did not will that he should kill the Wolf Demon," replied the young brave.

"The brave has tried, and the Shawnee chief will keep his word. Le-a-pah!"

The maiden came at his call.

The chief gave her to the embrace of the young warrior.

"You are both my children—go."

But the gleam of joy lighted up Ke-ne-ha-ha's stern face as he gave his daughter into the arms of her lover. The living Wolf Demon cast a mantle of gloom over his brain.

The brave and the girl withdrew from the lodge. The manner of the chieftain forbade further words.

Left alone, Ke-ne-ha-ha strode up and down the narrow confines of the wigwam in sullen thought.

"Oh, that my life might save my people from this terrible scourge!" he murmured, with clenched teeth. "For the two lives, he has taken twelve. How many more of my nation must fall by the tomahawk of the Wolf Demon ere his taste for Shawnee blood will be satisfied?"

"One!" responded a deep voice.

Ke-ne-ha-ha turned, his blood chilled to ice with horror.

His eyes looked upon the terrible form of the Wolf Demon standing in the doorway of the wigwam. In the hand of the Demon shone the deadly tomahawk.

Ke-ne-ha-ha gazed with starting eyes upon the terrible figure.

"Let me be your body."

But as they were about to commence their search, the sound of footfalls approaching through the wood fell upon their ears.

"Hush!" cried Boone, grasping Kenton by the arm as he spoke; "do you hear that?"

"It's some one coming through the wood."

"Yes, and hyer all comers are enemies and not friends; let's to cover," said Boone.

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The Wolf Demon made no effort to prevent the chief from possessing himself of the weapon.

SATURDAY JOURNAL.

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those upon whom the duty fell were busily engaged in getting ready the evening meal, when, without having created the slightest sound that would give warning of their approach, two men, mounted upon the scraggy-looking mustangs of the country, rode out of the brush, and drew up on the confines of the camp.

It required but a single glance to see that they were ruffians of the lowest and worst class.

The long, tangled masses of unkempt hair and grizzled beard, together with the soiled and greasy appearance of their buckskin garments, gave them a look at once repulsive and dangerous.

They were both heavily armed—rifle, pistol, hunting-knife and hatchet were all disposed in their proper places.

With a loud, coarse greeting they dismounted and demanded the hospitality of the camp for the night.

This, upon the plains, is never refused, though in the present instance, it was accorded reluctantly, and in a few minutes the new-comers were as much at home as if they belonged to the party.

Leaving the strangers busily attacking the food that had been placed before them, we will go back to the time when the camp was first pitched.

Hardly had the wagons been drawn up in the usual half-circle, when a young man, tall, stalwart and handsome, the one whom we saw take the fatal bullet from the body of the murdered guide, made his way with a quick step and eager face, to where a light "carry-all" was standing a little removed from the other vehicles.

A clear, sweet voice greeted the young pioneer as he drew near, and the next instant a bright face shone from between the curtains, and a shapely hand was held forth in warm welcome.

"How has my darling stood the day's journey?" he asked, as he took the proffered hand in his broad palm.

"Why, it has been just delightful," was the answer, "and I am not tired a bit. You have come for our walk, have you not?"

"Yes, if you are really not wearied." Then turning to an elderly gentleman who was superintending the construction of a shelter by using blankets, wagon-covers, etc., he asked:

"Mr. Duncan, I have come to ask you permission to take Mabel for a short walk on the river. It will, perhaps, do her good after her confinement in the carriage all day."

"Certainly, my boy. Do so, but do not go too far," was the willing response of the father, who with a look of extreme satisfaction watched the young people as they strolled off into the forest.

It was plain to see that the pair were lovers.

Mark Hanley had won the heart of Mabel Duncan, in their old home on the banks of the Roanoke, and when Mr. Duncan turned his face toward the "land of the setting sun," Mark had left all and followed her home.

And so as they walked along the bank of this unknown stream in an almost unknown land, they talked of the old times in the home they had left, and mingled their hopes and expectations of those that were to come in the new home that they were to build for themselves.

Their tread upon the mossy bank was noiseless, and the tones of their voices were low and tender—so silent their steps, and so low their words that the birds upon the branches above their heads scarce noted their approach.

In this manner they drew near a dense thicket that spread across their path, and were on the point of returning, when, with startling effect, the deep, harsh tones of a man's voice, evidently speaking under strong excitement, fell upon their ears. With a quick motion Mabel turned to fly, but Mark seized her arm, and with a whispered word of caution drew her to his side.

He did not speak, but with a significant smile touched the hilt of a heavy six-shooter that hung at his belt.

"Curse you for a coward!" said the voice. "We've rubbed out their guides, an' now that we've got them blunderin' about the country like a lot uv young pigs 'ithout their mammy, you want ter back down."

"You lie when you say I'm a coward, an' you know it!" exclaimed a second voice, fiercely. "But s'posen the others don't git here in time, we'll be in a purty fix in their camp by ourselves."

"What's ter hinder us goin' in an' axin' fur 'commodations for the night? They'll give it; they're bound ter, and we kin' larn' the plan's an' act accordin'. Don't be a fool, Bill Long, an' spile a good thing."

"Since you said I wur a coward, d— you, I'll go whar you'll lead of it wur to a hotter place nor this. So pitch ahead, an' if trouble comes don't say as how I didn't want ter wait 'till the others kin' up."

"Oh, Mark! what is it?" asked the frightened girl, in a trembling whisper.

"These are the men or a portion of them, who murdered our guides, and are now planning the destruction of us all," was the stern reply, and the young man's face wore a look of intense indignation. "Be quiet," he continued, "we must not alarm them. Only let them once get into camp, and then—" he did not finish the remark, but drew Mabel away noiselessly, and stole back into the forest.

When the lovers returned to camp the two ruffians were still devouring the food that had been placed before them.

They ate more like half-famished brutes than human beings, and presented, altogether, so disgusting an appearance, that Mabel shrank back shuddering in every limb.

For one instant Mark Hanley gazed sternly at the pair, and then dropping Mabel's arm, he strode directly across to where they were seated.

As he did so, Mabel sprang forward to where her father was still engaged upon the shelter, and hastily calling him a little apart, began speaking in a low, hurried manner.

Before her tale was half told the pioneer comprehended all, and rushed to the carriage for his rifle, which was secured to the uprights that supported the top.

While this bit of by-play was in progress Mark had halted directly in front of the pair, and paused to take a good look at them as they were seated, side by side, upon a fallen log.

"Hello, youngster! yer don't seem to take much odds 'bout star'in' a man outen countenance," growled the man whom he had first heard speaking in the forest.

"I was admiring that rifle of yours," coolly replied the young man, pointing to a short but unusually heavy gun that lay against the log by the side of the owner.

"Yer war, hey? Well, an' what d'ye

think uv her?" asked the ruffian, laying his hand upon the piece.

"Too heavy, I should think," replied the young man, reaching out his hand to take the gun.

The other darted a quick keen look at Mark, slightly drew back the rifle, and then, seemingly thinking it better not to manifest any suspicion, handed it over, and seated himself upon the log.

Mark grasped the weighty weapon, and stepped back a pace or two, put his hand into his bullet-pouch and drew forth a large bullet, that had the appearance of having been once used.

Without a word, he placed the ball upon the bore. It fitted exactly, but would not drop down, owing to a slight protuberance caused by contact with the murdered man's bones.

"I have a ball here that fits your rifle," said Mark, sternly. "Shall I tell you where I got it?" and he stepped back another pace or two, and threw the rifle up, fairly covering the villain's heart.

The two both saw that they were discovered, but they did not know how fully their devilish plans were known. With a yell that would have shamed a Comanche, they started to their feet and drew their revolvers.

The leading villain, the one who owned the rifle, sprung forward toward Mark, who, at the moment, drew trigger.

Instead of the report that should have followed, only a sharp click, as the hammer fell, was the result.

The gun was not loaded, or probably not capped.

At that moment the other scoundrel fell before the unerring aim of Mr. Duncan, who had succeeded in getting his rifle free from its support in time to use it when the lashed each other to spars and committed themselves to the waves.

Then a large party of the negroes, aided by some black sailors belonging to the crew, who had been left behind, made a raft, which took nearly all the slaves upon it, being very large. It was made of ship spars and masts, with empty water-casks, of which there was an abundance on all sides.

Those who were unable to leave the ship were left to their fate, which, as the ship was unmanageable from the breaking of its rudder, was a cruel one. The last remnant were chiefly women, and being attached to one another, did their best to save one another's lives. Seeing, from the burning mountain, that land was not far off, they lashed each other to spars and committed themselves to the waves.

In this way was Pablina washed ashore. The others met with a very different fate.

As soon as Pablina and Polly could understand one another thoroughly, it came out, in the course of conversation, that there was a fertile wooded island to the northward, which at once roused hopes in the young girl's bosom which had never been quenched. She had seen, as they were swept away in the gust of mist and rain, that there was an island at no great distance from the ship.

Then it was Pablina's turn to speak.

She had said nothing of her own.

"I have a ball here that fits your rifle," said Mark, sternly. "Shall I tell you where I got it?" and he stepped back another pace or two, and threw the rifle up, fairly covering the villain's heart.

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The leading villain, the one who owned the rifle, sprung forward toward Mark, who, at the moment, drew trigger.

Instead of the report that should have followed, only a sharp click, as the hammer fell, was the result.

The gun was not loaded, or probably not capped.

At that moment the other scoundrel fell before the unerring aim of Mr. Duncan, who had succeeded in getting his rifle free from its support in time to use it when the lashed each other to spars and committed themselves to the waves.

Then a large party of the negroes, aided by some black sailors belonging to the crew, who had been left behind, made a raft, which took nearly all the slaves upon it, being very large. It was made of ship spars and masts, with empty water-casks, of which there was an abundance on all sides.

Those who were unable to leave the ship were left to their fate, which, as the ship was unmanageable from the breaking of its rudder, was a cruel one. The last remnant were chiefly women, and being attached to one another, did their best to save one another's lives. Seeing, from the burning mountain, that land was not far off, they lashed each other to spars and committed themselves to the waves.

In this way was Pablina washed ashore. The others met with a very different fate.

As soon as Pablina and Polly could understand one another thoroughly, it came out, in the course of conversation, that there was a fertile wooded island to the northward, which at once roused hopes in the young girl's bosom which had never been quenched. She had seen, as they were swept away in the gust of mist and rain, that there was an island at no great distance from the ship.

Then it was Pablina's turn to speak.

She had said nothing of her own.

"I have a ball here that fits your rifle," said Mark, sternly. "Shall I tell you where I got it?" and he stepped back another pace or two, and threw the rifle up, fairly covering the villain's heart.

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THE OLD LETTER.

BY JOE JOY, JR.

Among a thousand letters old,
That dryly talk of stocks and shares,
Of gains or losses upon gold,
This little note has lain for years.
A paltry place for this dear thing
To hold—no possible receipt!
And it is a golden ring.
I gave it to her one summer eve.

And on the fading page I read,
"Dear Tom, I send this back to you,
As when you gave it you agreed.
That, had I reason, I should do.
You're always jealous"—so I was.
I dare not speak to any friend
But him who goes to get his dues,
And so I think our love should end.

You're always looking at me so,
Why I keep myself in your sight?"

"And then you're coming every night,
And always hanging round me." True,

And I was happy there to be,
My love that made a saint of you,

Oh, Nannie, made a fool of me.

"I never always sighed, always sad,
And mad because I'm not. Oh, sir,
Why are you so?" Because I had

"But I was full of sneaking, then,
The joke me of you night and day,

I hope you won't get mad at me,
But here's your ring. Don't stay away,

But then, remember, you are free!"

And that is all—I well, that's enough:
I told the letter up again;

I now might call it foolish stuff,

But I was full of sneaking, then,

And kept my heart against its will,

But reading this I almost find

That heart within me bleeding still.

The Pirate's Prize.

BY CAPT. CHARLES HOWARD.

"Now for the boat, my boys!" cried Gonzales Valverde, as he rushed toward the beach with a beautiful and unconscious woman in his arms.

One of his swarthy followers carried a bright-haired little boy in his strong arms. The little fellow bore a remarkable resemblance to the woman in Valverde's possession. Well might he, for she was his mother—she, whose youthful features bespeak her more girl than woman.

At last Gonzales Valverde reached his boat, which lay within sight of the Spanish settlement, from which he had abducted his lovely burden. With the agility which characterizes the thorough nautical man, he sprang into the little craft, and the child boy was rudely tossed in after him.

He turned to his men, and glanced from them down the Florida coast.

A sight greeted him which sent the color from his cheeks, and parted his lips with a terrible oath.

A vessel was bearing down upon his own piratical smack, which stood out to sea.

"Off!" he shouted, pointing excitedly toward the unwelcome sight; "off, men, for Heaven's sake! The Planet—his accursed brigantine—is bearing down upon us. Off, off, I say!"

The pirates glanced at their enemy, and then pushed the boat forward, until a wave struck and threw her toward their ship.

Valverde saw that he would reach his own craft, the dread Sweeper of the Seas, before the Planet could intercept him; and once upon her crimson-stained decks, he considered himself secure. He could not overcome the Planet in a fair engagement; but he knew that he could easily outlast her.

When near the Sweeper, the child-wife opened her eyes.

She saw the approaching Planet, but she did not recognize it—she did not dream that the captain who paced its noble deck was her husband.

She gazed upon her boy—her little Verdo—and then looked up into the pirate's un pitying eyes.

"I will not take you back to the settlement," he cried, interrupting her in the midst of tearful pleadings. "Look yonder. The captain of that brigantine is my bitterest enemy. I will not step into his power for a woman's sake! There was a time, Silva, when I would have done any thing for your sake; but you refused my love for his name. Now, am I not revenged? In my island home you shall become my—"

"Slave!" she interrupted him, in her bitter voice.

"As you wish it," he said, smiling.

Finally the ship was reached, and the occupants of the boat found themselves on her deck. The first thing that met Valverde's eye was a number of his men laboring at the pumps.

"Mardo, what does this mean?" he demanded, striding up to his lieutenant.

"We are sinking, sir."

Without replying, Valverde darted below.

The Spanish wife and her boy were left in the care of an officer.

Presently the pirate chief reappeared on deck, and sprung toward his lieutenant with drawn pistol.

"Mardo," he cried, with flashing eyes, "holes have been bored in our bottom! The traitor still walks our decks, and you are he!"

A deathly pallor overspread the lieutenant's face, and he shrank from the leveled pistol of his infuriated commander.

Valverde's pistol spoke, and Mardo went to the deck a bloody corpse.

"Thus I punish traitors!" he cried, turning to his men with smoking pistol. "Sapera, convey that woman and her child to my cabin and lock them in."

Sapera turned to Silva, whose eyes were riveted upon the approaching ship.

Suddenly a shriek welled from her throat, and she staggered back to fall insensible into the officer's arms.

"She has recognized the Planet," said Valverde. "Below with her, Sapera. We must fight—and die, for escape now is not to be thought of."

The officer bore the prisoners below, and returned to the deck.

Meanwhile the Planet had continued to approach the notorious Sweeper of the Seas.

The pirate-chief knew that his vessel was gradually settling, and that his doom was unavoidable.

He thought not of surrendering to superior numbers; only of fighting till not one of his crew survived.

Presently the Planet fired a shot which elicited a response from her antagonist. The shots, however, were harmless, for they fell wide of their intended mark.

On, on came the Spanish brigantine, and lower and lower sunk the Sweeper of the

Seas. A desperately determined look wreathed the begrimed faces of the pirates, who sabre and pistols in hand, awaited the onset.

In the captain's cabin knelt the Spanish mother, with her boy clasped to her wildly beating heart. She heard the terrible booming of the death-freighted cannon, and the defiant words of encouragement which the pirates passed to one another. She knew that the vessel was sinking, and felt that soon her darling child would slumber on the sands of the gulf at her side.

Suddenly a broadside burst from the Planet. It mercilessly shattered her enemy's vessel, and stretched some of his best gunners dead upon the deck. The piratical craft shook like a leaf under the terrible discharge, and a minute later the vessels closed, and the Planet's crew swarmed over her sides.

Then followed the dreadful encounter. Inch by inch the pirates disputed the gory decks of their sinking vessel; but their fierce bravery availed them nothing. They were cut and shot down on every hand; no quarter being asked or given.

Foremost among his crew fought Lioni Zavera, husband and father to the trembling, praying ones in the cabin. He sought Gonzales Valverde with bloody sabre, and at last he saw the pirate dash below. Instantly he followed, and beheld his enemy—the enemy of Spain, as well—enter the cabin.

"He shall not escape my sword!" cried Zavera, and the next moment, having dashed open the cabin door, he gazed upon a sight which concealed his blood.

Valverde's reeking sabre was raised over his wife, and his child was crushed pale and shivering in one corner of the cabin, awaiting his doom.

The pirate's saber had started upon its descent, when the husband and father struck.

Valverde's arm was severed, and with a cry of mingled rage and pain, he drew a pistol and turned. Quick as lightning the weapon flew to a level with Zavera's head; but it was never discharged, for the saber again descended, and the pirate-chief sunk to the floor a corpse.

As the captain of the Planet turned to embrace his wife and child, he heard a command on deck which he well understood.

A pirate had fired the sinking Sweeper of the Seas, and the sailors were leaving her. Zavera did not take the kisses he craved, but lifted his loved ones in his arms and darted from the cabin. He gained the

"Three uv the party staid behind whar the scrimmage had took place.

"The next year Jim an' me started fur the trappin' season from Randal, further up the river, an' hearin' that beaver war plenty over in the Marshy Lake, we made fur the p'int an' druv stakes.

"Sum uv you fellers that have been ther work afore we're done," sez I, gettin' to another hole.

"Shure anuff that they war, all the fambly 'cept the cuss I hed rubbed out, an' the way they kin up showed that they war spilin' fur a fight.

"About the time they got in range they took cover, an' begin jumpin' from tree to tree an' so on till they'd got up to the edge uv the little clearin' whar the ranch stood.

"'Hello! the house!' shouted old Kerg,

"'Hello,' sez I.

"'Hold yur fire an' let's parley,' sez he.

"'All right, but keep t'others off. No dodgin',' sez I ag'in.

"With that the old cuss stepped out from behind his tree an' walked right up to the door.

"'Ar' you a-goin' to open?' he said.

"'Not no great deal, we ain't. What do yer want?' spoke up Jim, sorter savage like.

"'Keep yur eye peeled over there, Bill,' sez e, an' the other feller that warn't that answered, 'all right,' so naturally, that I wish I may drop in my tracks if I didn't think that war another. 'Twur Jim, you know, makin' b'leevin' that war three on us.'

"'How meny uv ye ar' thar in that cabin?' sez old Kerg.

"'You'll think that's a thousand of yer tackin' it,' says Jim.

"'Well, it don't make no matter,' sed Kerg; 'what I wants to know is, why the h—d did you shoot one uv my boys?'

"'Cause he war a durn'd, sneakin' thief, an' war cleanin' our traps,' sez Jim, in other man's voice.

"'It's a lie,' sed old Kerg, who war git-in' mad by this time.

"'You lie yerself, yer durned old hoss-

"'Look out, Jim, hyar they comes!' I yelled out, loud es I could fur larfin' at Jim, an' sure anuff, they war, an' in ainst, too.

"'Down with the old cuss, Red!' shouts Jim, an' I lets drive at ther vill'in, but ther rifle throwed off on me, an' flashed in ther pan. Jim he throwed one uv 'em right in his tracks, an' then they closed in on ther cabin, an' begun choppin' the door.

"'We couldn't manage to shoot, no way, fur ye see, we hadn't left no loop-holes, a cussed big mistake, boyees, which none uv ye must never make.'

"Ther door war the stoutest part uv the



THE PIRATE'S PRIZE.

the rock, I draws a close bead, an' lets it have a half-ounce smash into its big kar-kass.

The flames were swiftly approaching the pirate's magazine, and Zavera plunged into the smoke which came up from below in stifling columns. A moment he disappeared to his men, when he suddenly emerged from the smoke, and gained his own deck as the pirate blew up with deafening noise!

The Planet sailed into the inferno before the Spanish settlement, and that night Lioni Zavera clasped his wife and son to his heart, and thanked his God for the triple escape.

Long years have passed since that tragic day; but to the curious, is still pointed out the spot where the bloody scenes were enacted, and to him is related the story of the pirate's fatal prize.

"Hyar's the bad luck, Red," sez Jim, givin' the shadler a kick with his foot.

"Yes, that's him," sez I, an' es I turned round to pick up the beaver the feller had dropped, I see thrice more uv the shadlers a-makin' fur what an' Jim stood.

"They wur purty close onto us afore I seed 'em, but they hadn't diskuvered us yet because uv a big rock that lay kinder between us.

"My rifle warn't loadeden, an' seenin' I wouldn't hav' time ter foddher her, I whispers to Jim that we'd better make tracks for the ranch.

"Stoopin' purty close we got to cover afore the shadlers kin up to whar the dead lay, an' that we halft a bit to listen.

"Lordy! what a lot uv cuassin' an' howlin' an' slashin' around.

"Twurn't long afore we found out who the cuss war that he'd rubbet out, an' when we knowned that it war one uv old Kerg Bartlett's boys, we see in a minit that ther was a goin' ter be trouble.

"We watched the others tote off the dead 'un, an' then we made for the ranch.

"This ar' wuss nor Pawnees, Red," sez Jim, "an' I tell you, we've got ter do su'thin', either fight it out, er cut sumwhare else."

"Which'll it be, Jim?" sez I.

"Fight 'em, an' be durned to the greasy karkasses," sed Jim, savage as a meat-ax.

"Nuf sed," sez I, "an' with that we begin ter git ready for the squall that war sartin ter come long 'bout daylight, which war

"Our ranch wurnt much to speak of in the way uv a fort. A passel uv good-sized logs, a wheen uv rocks an' the like wur all, but then, you see, that war me an' Jim Curtis inside, an' yer kin bet high that that war sumthin'."

"Hyar they come," sed Jim, who was peekin' out uv a hole in the side frontin' the crack.

"Four uv 'em, Red, an' I reckin' that old Kerg himself are one uv 'em."

"Ef old Kerg ar' that then thar'll be hot

old shanty, an' they soon guy it up, an' I heard one uv 'em say suthin' bout fire.

"Twurn't long afore ther cabin war blazin', an' when we see that, Jim an' me jess looked at one another.

"Goin' under this time, Red," sez Jim.

"Looks that away," I sez.

"Bound to make a rush fur it," sez Jim, an' I see him look to the primin', an' loosen his knife.

"By that time ther whole consarn war in a bleeze, an' I tell you, lads, it wur hot in there. The vill'ins, we knowed, hed treed right in front uv ther door, an' that they stood ready to let us hev it jes' soon es we kin out."

"Twur fight es day—in fact, day had about broke, but enyhow, the bleeze wur mighty bright.

"One uv war bound ter go down at ther first dash, mebby both, an' under such sarencuses things looked squally.

"Putty soon one end uv the shanty dropped in, an' we seed the dash hed ter be made right off, er not a' tall.

"Reddy, Red?" sez Jim, cool an' calm like.

"I be, Jim," sez I.

"Well, hyar goes—What ther blazes ar' that?" sez Jim, stoppin' an' list'nin'.

"Twur a loud yell, an' then two or three